



## Feed the Future Country Fact Sheet

Online Version: <https://www.feedthefuture.gov/article/giving-children-better-chance-lead-healthy-lives-guatemala>

# Giving Children a Better Chance to Lead Healthy Lives in Guatemala



USAID

Mothers and children in Alta Verapaz, Guatemala, are seeing improved nutrition outcomes thanks to Feed the Future.

Every child should grow up to be healthy, but that is not the reality for many children in Guatemala.

As a result of food insecurity and chronic undernutrition, too many children throughout Guatemala suffer from physical and mental disabilities that can last a lifetime.

But in Alta Verapaz, where food insecurity conditions are most severe, families in the region are eating a greater variety of more nutritious foods. With this more diverse diet, not only has the rate of child stunting decreased, but so has the rate of underweight children.

What has brought about this change? As part of Feed the Future's strategy in Guatemala, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and Mercy Corps have partnered under a new program to improve the nutrition of women and children particularly vulnerable to food insecurity, so that fewer children face the challenges of undernutrition and underdevelopment.

Guatemala's rates of chronic under- and malnutrition are among the highest in Latin America and in the world. That's why this development food assistance program aims to prevent undernutrition before it happens, in communities where undernutrition rates tend to be highest. In Alta Verapaz, USAID is working with 266,000 people in 936 communities that have some of the highest rates of stunting, as well as infant and maternal mortality, in the country.

In line with Feed the Future's approach to improved nutrition, the program focuses on the critical 1,000 days from pregnancy through a child's second birthday, when interventions to prevent stunting and underdevelopment are most effective. All families with pregnant and lactating women and children under two are targeted, not just those who are already undernourished.

Participating families receive direct food assistance and are educated on a variety of nutrition and health related topics. In coordination with local non-governmental organizations and Guatemala's Ministry of Health, the program is establishing better health services that fit the needs of these communities.

"I am wholeheartedly grateful for the field educators' visits to my home, because if it weren't for them, my daughter could be

dead by now,” says one mother, Irma Irlanda Tun Cao. “I used to give her food that was not suitable. The program taught me that these foods do not contain the necessary nutrients and recommended I feed her with products harvested in my community together with the food donated by the people of the United States. The health of my daughter, Ana Patricia, is improving.”

When the program began, more than 60 percent of children under five in Alta Verapaz were chronically undernourished and infant and mortality rates were among the worst in Guatemala. Today, there are signs of improvement among participating families. Families are eating a greater variety of foods that provide better nutritional value, and across the board, rates of stunted and underweight children are dropping.

As USAID continues to contribute to Feed the Future's strategy in Alta Verapaz and throughout Guatemala, more children will have the chance to grow and live healthy adult lives thanks to improved nutrition and reduced food insecurity.